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The CIA problem

By Joseph C. Harsch

Three recent events in the news suggest fairly strongly that the role of the Central Intelligence Agency needs some pretty serious rethinking.

First was the discovery that President Nixon attempted with some preliminary and partial success to use the CIA for domestic partisan political ends. We trust this will not happen again soon, but it is unthinkable that the CIA should become an instrument of domestic factionalism. More safeguards are desirable.

Second is the strong suspicion that the CIA gave too much comfort for far too long to the now thoroughly discredited former regime of the colonels in Athens. That regime caused a lot of trouble. The worst thing it did was to unleash the coup d'etat on Cyprus against Archbishop Makarios which brought down his regime, unleashed a wave of terror, brought in a massive Turkish Army to Cyprus, and undid a generation of patient effort to produce peaceful coexistence between Greeks and Turks on Cyprus.

The national interests of the United States in the eastern Mediterranean are best served by good relations between Greeks and Turks. Anything that embitters rather than improves Greek-Turkish relations deserves the United States. Insofar as the CIA supported and encouraged the colonels it injured the best interests of its own country. The evidence seems pretty clear that the colonels did get some CIA aid. The whole matter ought to be brought into the open as a first step toward changes which can prevent a repetition of such counterproductive activity.

Third, the evidence is now impressive that the CIA sought deliberately to prevent Salvador Allende from becoming President of Chile and when he did, in 1970, spent more money in an attempt to "destabilize" that regime.

The official policy of the Government of the United States toward the Allende regime was one of tolerance and noninterference. The State Department insists that it refrained from any interference in Chile's internal affairs which, so far as the State Department itself is concerned, may well be true. The State Department isn't supposed to know what the covert side of CIA is up to. Sometimes it actually doesn't, although Henry Kissinger, then at the White House,

sat on a special subcommittee of the National Security Council which approved the project of "destabilizing" the Allende experiment in Chile.

The point here is that the bringing down of the Allende regime was an act of clandestine war against a theoretically friendly government. It was authorized covertly by a covert branch of the executive establishment. This infringed upon the constitutional right of the Congress to declare war. It was the waging of covert and undeclared war by a branch of the government which has no constitutional right to do such things.

Granted the Soviets do precisely such things. And it often boomerangs against them.

The lesson surely is that bringing down a supposedly friendly government is much too serious a business to be entrusted to clandestine operators. If the Congress chooses to declare war on a foreign country, it then becomes the duty of the executive establishment to implement that policy. But it's time to get the initiative in such matters back into the public domain.

Perhaps it did seem desirable back in 1964 to try to keep Senor Allende out of office in Chile. And undoubtedly it seemed desirable to a lot of people in high places in Washington to keep him out of office in 1970. And after 1970 many wanted to see his experiment ended as quickly as possible. But he was installed as President by constitutional means. He was forced out of office in a bloody revolution which has put a military dictatorship into the most democratic and formerly most prosperous country in South America.

The results of clandestine interference in the internal affairs of Chile would certainly seem to suggest that this is a poor way of doing the national business.

The CIA has had an excellent record in gathering and weighing intelligence about other countries in the world. Its record of clandestine activities has been marked by less success, the Bay of Pigs being the classic example. Covert subversion is a highly dubious activity. If it must be done, surely it must be more subject to congressional supervision and control than in the past.